

Providence College
Ninety-First Commencement
Commencement Mass Homily
May 16, 2009
Rev. Brian J. Shanley, O.P., President

The reading from St. John's gospel that we have today comes in the context of Jesus's Farewell Discourse. It is the night before Jesus is to die, and he is gathered with his disciples in an intimate setting to teach them one last time about the deepest meaning of his life and mission, and to prepare them for the future. It is, in a sense, the equivalent of Jesus's graduation speech to his disciples, summing up the past and sending out into the future.

In the providence of God, this farewell speech is today addressed to you. I want you to believe that in it Jesus is talking to you one last time at Providence College, summing up what you have learned and sending you forth. This is the most important discourse that you will hear this weekend, and I hope you carry something away that reminds you of what you learned from Christ here these past four years and that prepares you for your future.

The theme of Jesus's final discourse is, naturally, God's love. Love lies at the heart of all that Jesus did and at the heart of what he was about to do on the Cross. For one last time, Jesus wants to teach them and you about love.

1. Jesus begins by saying, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Jesus's love for us comes out of and reveals the Father's love for him. It is what God's love looks like in human form. It tells us the important truth that our ability to give love to others comes out of the love that we first receive ourselves. We do not originate love, it is a gift that we receive and then pass on. You have all been given that gift. Just look around you today. See your parents and families who have loved you. Look at the friends sitting around you. Look at your teachers, the people who work on this campus, the Dominicans. Most importantly, look at Christ here present speaking to you intimately in his Word, sharing his body and blood with you, inviting you into the Trinity. You have been much loved these past four years, meaning your capacity for love is great. You have received the most precious gift of all and you have it to give to others.

2. Jesus then tells his disciples that the reason he is reminding them of his love is so that they can share his joy. The deepest gift of the Easter season is the Risen Christ's own joy that the Father's love is stronger than death. Joy comes from knowing that you are loved by a love that can never be broken. Today is a day of joy for you, the culmination of your four years at Providence College. The joy you feel in your hearts for all that God has given to you in love is his gift to you today. If you live your life in God's love, you will live your life in the joy of Christ. Remain in that joy that comes from a love that will never leave you alone.

3. The next moment in the passage is the closest thing to a kind of graduation. Jesus says to his disciples that they are no longer servants but friends because he has given them the gift of his own knowledge of God the Father. Friendship involves disclosure and intimacy and giving. You have learned much about friendship at Providence College; this too has been one of God's gifts to you. I hope and pray that you are graduating into a genuine friendship with Jesus, that you have learned intimacy with him and that you will grow in that intimacy for the rest of your life. Today he calls you his friend. It is the most important friendship of your life. Take the time in your life to pray and cultivate it. The mark of whether you are a friend of Jesus will be your ability to lay down your life in sacrifice for another. You have been loved with sacrificial love by your families and your Lord. Love will require sacrifice from you in a form you do not now know. When the time comes, trust that the love you have received will be there to give.

4. Finally, Jesus tells his disciples that he has chosen them individually to go forth in love. He has chosen you, you did not choose him. On the day you were baptized, God chose you as his beloved son or daughter. And now Christ commissions you to go forth and bear fruit. Like every good graduation speech, Christ ends with a charge to go forth and change the world with the simple command that sums everything up: Love one another.

This farewell discourse is God's gift to you today. It is the most important speech you will hear this weekend and in your four years at PC. It sums up the heart of what we hope you have learned and sends you forth to the future. Pay attention to this speech as if the rest of your life depended upon it. Because it does.

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